New Kunsan building gets better with AGE

By Senior Airman Laura Holzer
8th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

The largest construction project on Kunsan is getting better with AGE.

Construction for the new Aerospace Ground Equipment Flight's (AGE) workshop began Jan. 30. The almost $2.5 million building will put all three Combat AGE Teams (CAT) and the production support section under one roof.

"The money and approval came from leftover funding from the Kosovo Conflict," said Tech. Sgt. Sam Wohlers, 8th Maintenance Squadron NCO-in-charge of production control. "The need for a new facility was placed in a bill that was approved by Congress and made into a law."

The 8th MXS AGE flight maintains and transports powered and non-powered ground support equipment like maintenance stands, tow bars, electrical generators and air conditioning units to the 8th Fighter Wing and 80th and 35th Fighter Squadrons. The equipment is used for flightline maintenance for the assigned F-16 aircraft, transient alert aircraft, and maintenance back-shops. The flight also maintains War Reserve Materiel (WRM).

The Production Support Section provides scheduling, supply, bench stock, special tool, hazardous material, equipment accountability, and facility management in support of the 8th CAT, 80th CAT and the 35th CAT.

The flight originally worked out of two buildings. The buildings were large enough to support all 57 people and 577 pieces of powered and non-powered ground support equipment. However, the facilities were starting to show their age.

"There was no ventilation, no air conditioning and poor lighting," said Master Sgt. James Schroeder, 80th Combat AGE Team chief. "It was like working out of a tin shed."

The steel-framed structures were originally built in Thailand. They were broke down and rebuilt in Vietnam. Then, they were taken apart a second time and moved to Kunsan. Even though the 30-year-old buldings offer some history, the AGE flight will be glad to work in the new facility.

"This is really a quality of life issue," said Wohlers. "We'll have better lighting and more room to work. Just better everything."

The new building is scheduled to be finished in March 2002. Until then, the 80th and 35th CATs work out of one of the original structures. Wohlers said the flight has done some adjusting by using as much space as possible.

"There are people working out of what used to be our break room," he said. "We're renting trailers to use as offices and we even have portable bathrooms. We're making use of all the space we have. We're very crammed."

However, the lack of room has not affected productivity. In fact, 95 percent of the equipment the flight maintains is still operational.

"The people who are here now know that they probably won't see the new building," said Wohlers. "But they know what they have to do. The situation we're in has not affected the morale and productivity of our troops. Our people are doing an outstanding job."

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able to transfer them for additional care," explained Capt. Brandon Diamond, 374th Aeromedical Squadron, Yokota AB, Japan. "We received excellent support from Detachment 3, 607th Material Maintenance Squadron's commander and staff at Kwang Ju, when we deployed in on a C-130. Within a few hours, we had set up our MASF operations. The rotary wing training we were provided was phenomenal.

"Army Capt. Jake Dlugoz, 377th Air Ambulance Company, Camp Humphreys, was key to planning missions for deployed rotary wing operators at Teagu and provided superb training for Air Force members deployed to Kwang Ju," Diamond said. "His staff of pilots delivered on-time loads of patients each morning in concert with the C-130 that rolled through with engines running. Without the precision execution of the Eighth U.S. Army rotary wing piece, aircraft schedules would not have meshed and patients would be left behind in the system."

The EUSA participated in the exercise by providing patients and three helicopters for patient movement. Lt. Col. Jack Zeto, EUSA deputy surgeon, coordinated this effort.

"This year, the 52nd Medical Battalion tripled it's participation, flying Republic of Korea navy patients to a MASF operation at Kwang Ju and EUSA simulated patients from other sites during three days of exercise flying."

The MASF at Kwang Ju was a focal point of training.

Pacific Nightingale III also saw an increased involvement from the ROK. The ROK military provided patients for the aeromedical evacuation, and their own C-130 on day one for the first time.

According to Anderson, this exercise also needed more coordination than last year due to the MASF's new location, the expanded EUSA rotary wing play and the Air Transportable Hospital set up at Osan. He credits part of the success to cooperation from the Korean military, the U.S. Forces Korea surgeon, 374th Medical Group from Yokota AB and 374th AES.

Peninsula exercises are also successful because of the ROK-U.S. alliance.

"We're guests here and are grateful for the patience and support of the ROKAF planners. Our ROKAF hosts were superb in their willingness and flexibility to give us base access and to allow us to work with their training and flying schedules so we could execute the missions," Anderson said. "The process to get approval for access to bases takes time in a dual environment; and as hard as (the coordination) was, they were very good in helping us out."

Photo by Staff Sgt. Jerry Morrison, 8th CS/VI

Senior Master Sgt. Ruben Reyes, a senior aeromedical evacuation tech from the 433rd Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, Kelly AFB, Texas, gives the "thumbs up" for loading simulated casualties on a C-130 Hercules here during Exercise Pacific Nightingale III.

"(Pacific Nightingale III) wouldn't have happened without the support of senior leadership of the ROK military" he added.

The ROKAF support, as well as the support by the U.S. forces, was vital to the success of this exercise and what it means to the Korean peninsula.

"(The forces here) are in a dual culture and tri-service environment," Anderson said. "We need to train this way, because we live in this unique environment.

"If a wartime situation did occur, the Army would generate several casualties and we need to match the evacuation resources on peninsula to take care of as many personnel as possible," he said. "The ROK military is looking to us to share aeromedical training information to enhance their program. This type of training is an excellent step forward in developing cooperation and building strong processes and procedures for joint and combined aeromedical evacuation."

Another important training aspect is its humanitarian value.

"We don't always have incidents on the peninsula that relate to a (military) contingency," Anderson said. "We could experience typhoons, other natural disasters or a terrorist situation resulting in a mass casualty situation.

"Any time there's a need for a mass aeromedical evacuation, we need to have units ready to go, and to have the personnel in the theater prepared for any type of medical evacuation situation," he said.

"That's why we try to make this training as realistic as we can, and give it the same kind of tempo there would be in a real-world situation," Barbera added. "By training the way we want to do it in real life, that training ensures our people will make it through a very difficult time when everything is happening at once."

Although Pacific Nightingale's primary objective was focused on aeromedical evacuation of patients, the Korea Area Joint Blood Program Elements jumped in to exercise their own piece of the mission.

"The Blood Trans-shipment Center at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, kicked off the operation by preparing and shipping 1,800 units of simulated red blood cells, or a half pallet of blood, to the peninsula," said Capt. Ramil Codina, 51st Medical Group laboratory services chief. "When the blood arrived, it was delivered to the Blood Trans-shipment Center team here. They then processed (re-iced and repacked) the blood through the BTC in less than two hours. From there, the 18th Medical Logistics Battalion, redistributed the blood throughout the peninsula."

Everyone involved in this exercise agrees each operation was a complete success.